

THE MISSIONARY WORK OF THE AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLI- CATION SOCIETY

Its Origin

THE American Baptist Publication Society began its existence as a publishing concern. For the first sixteen years, or from 1824 to 1840, it depended upon depositories and auxiliary societies connected with Baptist churches for the distribution of its literature. Before the termination of this period it became evident that if the Society was to accomplish anything it must have wider and more direct connection with the people at large. The work was feeble, the receipts were small, the enterprise was contracted, the results were discouraging, and the Society was almost threatened with extinction.

Happily in 1840 those in charge of the Society, deeply conscious of the necessities of the case, adopted a different policy in the conduct of its affairs. They resolved to employ missionary colporters to carry from place to place and from door to door its tracts and books, antedating in this action, by one year at least, all other religious publishing houses. From that time the Society took on new life. The denomination became more interested in it. Its business increased. It began to be recognized as one of the chief agencies for propagating Baptist principles. The scattering of denominational and general religious literature in communities which had hitherto known and cared nothing for Baptist views of truth began to yield abundant harvest. The So-

ciety had tried to rise with but one wing, that of publishing. Now adding the missionary wing it found itself mounting to its true place among the active forces of the religious world.

When, twenty-five years later, the Sunday-school began to be recognized as one of the greatest instruments in the hands of the church for saving and instructing the young, the Society repeated its earlier experience. It discovered that mere publishing did not meet the needs of the day. The children of scattered Baptists in the newer portion of the land must be gathered into Sunday-schools. The Sunday-school forces of the denomination required organization and development. It was clearly seen that if this great agency for good was to be fully utilized, and the Sunday-school publications of the Society were to be widely distributed, Sunday-school missionaries must be appointed to take charge of the denominational Sunday-school work. Such missionaries were at once appointed. The results of their work no one can begin to estimate.

In 1891 the missionary work of the Society was still further enlarged by the chapel car. This enterprise was first put into the Society's hands by practical business men, who doubtless felt that the proper organization to take charge of it was one which combined the printed page and the living voice. The wisdom of their selection of the Publication Society has been indorsed by the givers of the five cars which have since been added. All of these cars are depots of religious and denominational literature, moving into the most needy points on the frontier with managers in charge to render them effective. Like the colporter and Sunday-school missionary, the chapel-car missionary was thrust upon the Society in a most providential way. The entire missionary work of the Society has been a natural evolution

growing out of the necessities of the case and in line with the development of the activities of the denomination at large. Experience brought it into existence and further experience justifies its continuance. The changes and improvements which have, from time to time, been made in the methods of carrying on the work, are also the results of an evolutionary process behind which may clearly be seen the hand of God.

Its Nature

The missionary work of the Publication Society easily differentiates itself from other forms of missionary effort. None of the missionaries of the Society take charge of churches. *The colporter and chapel-car missionaries* go from place to place and from house to house, on foot and on horseback, with bicycle or wagon, or in the chapel car, carrying with them the Bible and such books and tracts as are best adapted to their special fields. As they go they seek the personal salvation of those with whom they come in contact. They sell wherever they can do so and give to such as are unable or unwilling to buy. They gather the scattered people into neighborhood religious services and establish Sunday-schools. They are true frontiersmen in our denominational ranks, going into territory not now covered by the churches and clearing the way for the more organized work which usually follows. The characteristic feature of this portion of the missionary work of the Publication Society is the personal element. In this it strongly resembles the work done by our Lord. In our day no other form of work is more needed or more likely to produce blessed results.

The Sunday-school missionary establishes Sunday-schools and organizes the Sunday-school work in the field given him to occupy. He holds insti-

tutes for the instruction of Sunday-school officers and teachers. He keeps himself in constant communication with Sunday-school workers and assists in every way to promote work among the young.

In more recent years he organizes and directs teacher training and adult Bible classes, and greatly assists the Young People's Department and other denominational enterprises by bringing these into close connection with churches, young people's associations, and Sunday-schools.

Sunday-school missionaries are the only men in our denomination specially appointed to this particular phase of Christian effort. They occupy a unique place in the denominational activities, and are not only not infringing upon any other sphere of Christian labor, but are doing invaluable service in the building up of the kingdom of Christ.

It will thus readily be seen that the Missionary Department of the Society occupies a sphere of its own. It is the agency through which the power of the press is brought to bear upon the people at large and by which the young people are reached and prepared for the service of the Master. It is difficult to see how, without such a department, the Society could at all fulfil its mission, or the denomination fully meet the demands of the age.

Its Extent

The missionary work of the Publication Society is not confined to any section of the land or world. It extends to the South as well as to the North, and to foreign lands as well. Of the one hundred and twenty-nine missionaries employed last year, ten were in the Southern States. Ten colporters not included in our list are supported by the Society in China in co-operation with the

China Publication Society. One of the six chapel cars is operating in the South. Co-operative relations are maintained with several Southern organizations. Of course any transfer of the missionary work of the Society to any other body whose field was restricted to the Northern States would bring the Southern portion of the Society's missionary work to an end. This would be most unfortunate. The new towns springing up in Arizona, Oklahoma, and Missouri can be reached by the chapel car better than by any other agency. Besides this, there are thousands of Baptists in the South who regard the Publication Society as a bond of union between them and their Northern brethren, and are glad to have one thoroughly national organization where all American Baptists can meet on common ground. It is likely also, that in the future, as in the past, the Publication Society may be able to send its colporters into European countries whose laws forbid the work of Protestant ministers and missionaries. This was the case in Sweden and Germany, and may be the case in Turkey and Russia. To destroy the missionary work of the Society might therefore shut doors to denominational activity which are now open and inviting.

The Results Achieved

It is difficult to secure anything like a complete tabulation of the results of the missionary work of the Publication Society. Much of this work is of a personal sort, the results of which are known only to God. Still, those which can be tabulated are most encouraging. From the beginning the Society has had in its service five thousand two hundred and eighty-eight missionaries. These faithful workers have organized fourteen thou-

sand eight hundred and forty-eight Sunday-schools, held twenty-one thousand one hundred and four Sunday-school institutes, baptized forty-one thousand eight hundred and nine persons, constituted one thousand seven hundred and ten churches, visited two million five hundred and twelve thousand and ninety-six families. They have sold one million one hundred and eight thousand and eight books, and given away two hundred and three thousand five hundred and thirty-two volumes to the destitute. They have also distributed fifty-five million two hundred and sixty-one thousand and fifty-one pages of tracts. These great results have been secured at comparatively slight expense to the denomination. During the first fifty years of its history, the contributions to the Society's missionary work averaged less than sixteen thousand dollars per year, and during the past thirty-six years about seventy thousand dollars per year. That the results have more than justified the expenditure must be evident. To cripple a work thus manifestly blessed of God would involve a heavy responsibility.

Its Relations

The relations of the Missionary with the Publishing Department of the Society are very close and vital. The Missionary Department aids the Publishing Department greatly in the distribution and sale of its books and tracts and periodicals. Much of the success of the Publishing Department is due to the fact that its missionaries, directly and indirectly, promote the use of Baptist literature in churches, families, and Sunday-schools. The Publication Department recognizes this relation by giving the Missionary Department special discounts and by paying all the administrative expenses, amounting to about nine thousand

dollars per year. Every penny of money given the Society for its missionary work is therefore spent on the field, not a penny being used for the salary of the missionary secretary, for the payment of bookkeepers and clerks, or for offices for district secretaries. Besides all this, the profits of the Publishing Department go to the Missionary Department. A more inexpensive and advantageous arrangement for doing missionary work could not be devised.

The relations with other organizations are entirely harmonious and satisfactory. In February, 1899, the Home Mission Society submitted an agreement with regard to work upon the field shared by the two organizations, which was accepted by the Publication Society and has been faithfully adhered to. This agreement is as follows:

“WHEREAS, A joint committee from the American Baptist Home Mission Society, consisting of Stephen Greene, Alvah S. Hobart, W. C. P. Rhoades, C. B. Canfield, E. J. Brockett, T. J. Morgan, W. H. P. Faunce, and H. L. Morehouse, and from the American Baptist Publication Society, consisting of Samuel A. Crozer, A. J. Rowland, R. G. Seymour, J. Howard Gendell, Wayland Hoyt, George E. Rees, and B. F. Dennisson, met this day, February 2, 1899, in Philadelphia, for the purpose of so defining the work of each that in the future there shall be as little overlapping of work as possible, either in fact or in the estimation of the public, and in order that each may co-operate cordially with the other in carrying on work for Christ:

“It is mutually agreed that the duties of these Societies shall be as follows:

“1. That the American Baptist Home Mission Society shall continue its distinctive work of preaching the gospel, organizing churches and Sunday-schools in connection therewith, settling pastors, building meeting-houses, employing missionaries, and conducting educational work among the freedmen, Indians, Mexicans, etc., as heretofore.

“2. That the American Baptist Publication Society shall continue its distinctive work as the Publishing and Bible Society of our denomination, and also its distinctive work of organizing and establishing Sunday-schools and employing colporters.

“3. That the American Baptist Publication Society, in continuing its chapel-car service, shall so far work in co-operation with the Home Mission Society as to consult with the general secretary or district missionaries of that Society in regard to fields to be visited and to refer, as far as practicable, to these missionaries the baptism of converts, the organization of churches, the settling of pastors, and the building of meeting-houses.

“4. That in appeals for contributions, each society shall emphasize its own specific and distinctive work.”

In addition to the agreement thus submitted by the Home Mission Society and ratified by the Publication Society, general action was taken with regard to the relation of these Societies at the national meetings. At the anniversaries at St. Paul, Minn., in May, 1902, by the concurrent action of the American Baptist Missionary Union, the American Baptist Publication Society, and the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the presidents of these Societies were empowered and instructed to appoint a committee of fifteen to

take into consideration the following matters, namely, "Whether there be any lack of proper adjustment and proper co-operation between the three Societies, including their associate societies, as to fields of labor, collecting, and other agencies and methods of work; whether there may be improvement in their mutual relations for more harmonious, effective, and fruitful service; whether changes are needful or desirable in their forms of organization in their constitutions, by-laws, agencies and methods of work, and if changes are needed, recommending what they shall be."

Under these instructions the following committee was appointed: L. Moss, D. D.; A. H. Strong, D. D.; W. H. P. Faunce, D. D.; Henry G. Weston, D. D.; S. H. Green, D. D.; Emory W. Hunt, D. D.; Chas. R. Henderson, D. D.; Hon. W. A. Munroe; Hon. W. S. Shallenberger; A. J. Fox, Esq.; Pres. D. B. Purinton; Mr. E. J. Brockett; Mrs. Robert Harris; Mrs. Alice B. Coleman, and Mrs. J. N. Crouse. This committee composed, as will readily be seen, of some of the ablest and wisest men and women of the denomination, held several meetings during the year, in which they performed their service, made a most thorough investigation of all the points at issue, and at the anniversaries at Buffalo, N. Y., in 1903, made an elaborate report, which was unanimously adopted. So far as the relation of the Home Mission Society and of the Publication Society are concerned, the committee made the following statement and recommendation:

"To the subject of 'Field Work in America,' your committee has devoted long and patient consideration. We discovered at the outset of our work that one chief difficulty lies here. The testimony of a multitude of pastors and laymen, as well as the official correspondence on file at

the administrative offices, shows tension and friction at various times and places among representatives of our Publication and our Home Mission Societies. This condition may be sometimes due to the personal equation, sometimes to the very devotion of an official to his specific work, but is chiefly due to the administrative isolation of which we have spoken above. We do not recommend any radical measure, but rely on genuine willingness and determination to co-operate at every point. The vexed subject of the chapel-car work we have discussed from every point of view. We deem it needless now to discuss whether the chapel cars are useful, whether they might wisely have been entrusted to some other organization, or whether the laws of the State of Pennsylvania would allow a legal transfer. It is difficult to reverse history. The cars were given and the work has been done. The main difficulty lies in the kind of work sometimes attempted with the cars, and still more in the method of appeal in their behalf. There can be no more objection to a car than to a wagon as a means of distributing Bibles, books, and leaflets, and winning men, women, and children to the service of Christ. But if either wagon or car attempts to found churches which it cannot again visit, calls pastors that it cannot help support, and build meeting-houses for which the community cannot pay, it is passing out of its legitimate sphere, and laying a heavy burden on other agencies. It would be a reflection both on our business methods and our Christian spirit if our denomination should support two national societies in the work of founding churches and building meeting-houses in the same part of the country. Here again we repudiate the idea that any organization that can secure the funds is free to do any kind of work in any region. We hold that our denominational serv-

ants must respect their distinctive functions and fields, and that such mutual respect is the dictate of common sense and Christianity. In response to our question, 'Should each Society be required to keep strictly to the specific lines for which it was established?' the replies were nearly all affirmative. Our general conclusion on this subject is as follows:

"Believing that our great Societies are really desirous of the best welfare of all the work of our denomination, this committee recommends:

"That the chapel-car work remain in the hands of the Publication Society, and that, in its appeals for contributions to its Sunday-school, Bible, colporter, and chapel-car work it shall avoid all claims which would lead the public to confound this preparatory work with the work of the American Baptist Home Mission Society."

That the agreements and conclusions thus reached have been satisfactory to the Home Mission Society is evident from the fact that not a single complaint has ever been made by that Society since they were made. On the other hand, the Home Mission workers on the field have very generally co-operated with our missionaries and have repeatedly asked for the appointment of colporter and Sunday-school workers to supplement their own efforts. They have, in many instances, availed themselves of the aid of the chapel car. It was in response to the request of the representative of the Home Mission Society in eastern Cuba that a colporter for that section was appointed. It was the appeal of the Home Mission workers in South Dakota which led to the sending of a colporter wagon into that State, and it was largely through the efforts of the same brethren that the wagon was built and paid for. There have been many similar instances of mutual friendliness and co-operation. The field is so

wide and the need so great that overlapping of workers is impossible.

It should also be noted that in States in which the Home Mission Society is not actively engaged, the Publication Society has organic relations in missionary work with State conventions. This is true as well in States where the Home Mission Society is actively engaged. The chapel car is practically under the control of the State Board of the State in which it is operating. Indeed, all of our workers are under the most positive instruction to ally themselves with State organizations and the representatives of the Home Mission Society. Many of our Sunday-school missionaries are accepted as State missionaries for State Conventions or Sunday-school Boards. Every effort has been made to co-operate with existing agencies and to assist in promoting the general denominational efficiency in all parts of the land. There are on the files of the Society scores of resolutions of thanks from State and other bodies, expressive of gratitude for the aid our workers have given.

The relations sustained by the missionary work of the Society, both to its own Publishing Department and to other organizations, are therefore most vital and satisfactory. It is difficult to see how they could be improved.

Present State of the Work

Never in the history of the Society has its missionary work been more widely extended and more resultful than at the present time. Never has it been more generously and generally supported. Never were the calls for enlargement more pressing. In the older States, as well as in the newer States, the demand for the mis-

sionary work of the Society has never been so insistent. Many of our wisest laymen are giving largely to its treasury. It is being more and more seen by our people over the entire land that uniting as it does the power of the press with that of the living voice, the missionary work of the Society has a potency and permanence which offers one of the best possible opportunities for investment of time and money in the cause of Christ. To jeopardize in any way a work like this after seventy years of successful history in a time when its highest efficiency has been reached and recognized, and with a future of illimitable possibilities stretching before it, would be a denominational blunder of the first magnitude.

Difficulties in the Way of Transfer

Besides the fact already alluded to, that the transfer of the missionary work of the Publication Society to any organization restricted in its missionary operations to the Northern States would destroy that part of the work now carried on in the South, there are other considerations which should have great weight with all who have the peace and prosperity of the denomination at heart.

I. There are first, legal difficulties. The Publication Society is operating under a Pennsylvania charter and is, of course, subject to Pennsylvania laws. Under these laws it is impossible to vacate a trust. Money given to the Publication Society for its missionary work must be used in the prosecution of that work and cannot be transferred either in principal or income to any other organization. An eminent lawyer to whom this matter has been referred reports as his opinion that "the funds held by the Society must be controlled and

administered by the Society alone. It can neither subject its action to the control of a joint Board, Committee, or Commission, nor remove its treasury to another State so that its funds may there be handled in connection with the funds of another organization." If this opinion be correct, of which there can be no reasonable doubt, the Society must continue to use the income of the funds given to it for missionary work as directed by the donors, and has no legal right to transfer any portion of its property, investments, or income to any other organization.

The facts with regard to the American and Foreign Bible Society lend strength to this conclusion. At the Saratoga Bible Convention, in 1883, it was agreed that the American and Foreign Bible Society transfer its funds as well as its work to the Publication Society. The brethren composing the Board of the American and Foreign Bible Society sought to fulfil the instructions of that Convention, but found it impossible to do so; so far at least as their vested funds are concerned. Under the laws of the State of New York, the American and Foreign Bible Society was compelled to maintain its existence as a corporate body in absolute control of its funds. Precisely the same state of things must be expected in the case of the Publication Society. If the Society itself were to vote to transfer its missionary work to another organization, the courts of the State of Pennsylvania would compel it to maintain the trusts it had assumed and would render such action nugatory.

2. It should also be said that any transfer of the missionary work of the Publication Society would greatly jeopardize bequests to that work not yet paid or in which the Society has a residuary interest. Large amounts have been devised to the Society in wills. Large amounts have also been left

for the prosecution of the missionary work of the Society to be paid on the death of those who enjoy the income during their lifetime. It is hardly probable that the executors of estates will without legal contest pay over the principal sum of such bequests if the Society transfers its missionary work to others. In one instance known to the Society, a bequest of a quarter of a million of dollars would be involved.

3. The effect of a transfer of its missionary department would in all probability be very damaging to the Publishing Department of the Society. As already shown, its missionaries, directly and indirectly, dispose of many of the Society's publications. These missionaries have sold and given away over one million two hundred thousand books, and more than fifty million pages of tracts. Indirectly they have greatly aided the Society in the selling of its Sunday-school literature. Were the missionaries to be withdrawn there would doubtless be a large falling off in the sales, and the field would be open to undenominational publishing houses, who would do everything in their power to secure the patronage of Baptist churches and Sunday-schools. The Publishing Department of the Society in all probability would suffer great loss.

That this is no "bogy" is shown by the experience of our Congregational brethren. Thirty years ago the Congregationalists determined to do away with the missionary feature of their Publishing Society. "In 1874," says Hon. S. B. Capen, who tells the story in an address given at Hartford, Conn., May 25, 1899, "the National Council recommended that the missionary 'Sunday-school work be transferred to the Home Missionary Society, which was done in 1876. This transfer of work was made against the judgment of many of the officers of both Societies, and was a

most disastrous act. It nearly destroyed the Sunday-school missionary work, and if it had been allowed to stand it would have severely crippled the denomination. The receipts for Sunday-school work to the Home Missionary Society were very small, and those of the Publishing Society fell from twelve thousand two hundred and twenty-four dollars in 1873, to one thousand four hundred and sixty-four dollars in 1879. Shorn of what little missionary work it had done, the Society had small hold upon the denomination."

In the same address Mr. Capen also shows the effect of this action on the general interests of the Congregational body. "The increase in church-membership," he says, "fell from six thousand eight hundred and eighty-six in 1879, to one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two in 1880, and to only one thousand three hundred and fifty-three in 1881. The reason was apparent. From 1879 to 1882 the total gain in Sunday-school membership was eighteen thousand eight hundred and thirty-seven, or an average of only four thousand seven hundred and nine per year. As the growth of the churches comes largely from the Sunday-schools, it is no wonder that our church growth was at so low an ebb. We would not have had a denomination much longer if we had continued that policy. But in 1882 the reorganization of the missionary work of our Publishing Society was begun, and the gain was most remarkable. The next four years, 1883-1886, the total gain in our Sunday-school was sixty-seven thousand five hundred and four, or an average of nearly seventeen thousand per year, a gain of thirty-five per cent over the previous four years."

With the record of this experience before us it would seem an act of supreme folly for our denomination to put itself in a position where it might be repeated. How much wiser to let well

enough alone and to stand clear of an experiment which in all probability would not only most seriously affect the publishing department of the Society, but also the general interests of the denomination.

General Considerations

A number of general considerations affecting the missionary work of the Publication Society should be taken into account in order to reach proper decision as to its transfer or retention.

1. It should be noted that all religious publishing houses have a missionary side. The Presbyterian Publishing Board, the Congregational Publishing Society, the American Sunday School Union, the American Tract Society, and all other religious publishing houses sufficiently strong to do so, employ missionaries to assist them in their work. Our Methodist friends have recently established a Sunday-school Board, and are expecting to put at least one hundred missionaries in the field. The truth is, religious publications have very slow sale. If the printed page is to be used for good, it must be carried to the homes of the people. It is useless merely to print, relying on the popular demand for the Bible and religious books and tracts. The true function of a religious publishing house is to distribute as well as to produce, and for this distribution it must rely in no small degree upon missionaries. That these missionaries should be in the employ of the Publication Society itself and under its control is too manifest to require argument. Any other arrangement must, in the nature of the case, be more expensive and must prove unsatisfactory to all parties.

2. The difficulty of supposed overlapping is much more imaginary than real. As already

stated, the field is too wide and the present needs too great for any real trouble in this direction. There is doubtless some duplication of work on the part both of the Publication Society and the Home Mission Society. The Publication Society, in its chapel-car service, must necessarily engage in evangelistic effort. The Home Mission Society, in its work among the foreign-speaking people and in its city mission work, must employ essentially colporter methods. But instead of mourning over this state of things, both Societies should rejoice. If more work is done by two organizations, more money secured and larger results achieved than would be possible with one organization, surely no one should complain. There is no room for petty jealousies, and no excuse for insisting on prerogatives when the promotion of the Lord's cause is at stake. What is needed is more of the spirit of the great apostle expressed in his letter to the Philippians: "What then, notwithstanding every way, whether in pretense or truth, Christ is preached, and therein I do rejoice, and will rejoice."

3. As to the objection that there are too many calls upon our churches for benevolent offerings, little need be said. This is really an appeal to niggardliness, and if carried to its legitimate conclusion would do away with all benevolent and missionary work. Other denominations have twice as many general missionary organizations and do not complain. If any diminution is made, it should be in a case of newer organizations and special objects, and not to the prejudice of those older and more important organizations which, for three-quarters of a century, have proved their worthiness to occupy the largest place in the denominational life.

Conclusion

We have striven to show in this paper the origin, nature, extent, and results of the missionary work of the Publication Society and its relation with other forms of Christian and denominational activity. We have stated the present condition of the work, and have given some of the difficulties attending its transfer to any other organization. We have also offered some considerations affecting the question of such transfer. It remains only to add that we most sincerely believe that the best interests both of the Publication Society and of the denomination at large require the maintenance of a missionary department by the Society. Any change in their present condition would be a hazardous experiment which, as in the case of our Congregational brethren, might be disastrous in the extreme. The Publication Society has conducted its missionary operations with great success, and to the satisfaction of the great majority of our people. To cripple it now, after all these years of blessing, would be a reflection on the past and a menace for the future.

